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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001582

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: WEEKEND DEMONSTRATIONS IN JORDAN SIZABLE, PEACEFUL

REF: A. AMMAN 745

[1](#)B. AMMAN 974

Classified By: Ambassador Edward W. Gnehm. Reasons: 1.5 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. The weekend of March 15-16 saw sizable GOJ-permitted demonstrations in Amman and Irbid as well as smaller gatherings in other locations. The demonstrations were peaceful, with no security incidents reported. Estimates of crowd sizes varied widely, but reliable sources indicate that Amman saw approximately 3,000 participants while Irbid had as many as 2,000. The message was largely standard: anti-USG policy, pro-Palestinian, and supportive of the Iraqi people. However, both major demonstrations carried a new "theme" protesting rumored US troops in Jordan and the possibility that Jordan could be a "launch-pad" for allied action against Iraq. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C). Credible media reports and embassy contacts present at the March 16 demonstration in Amman report that there were approximately 3,000 participants. (Note: media reports put the number in Amman variously as 5,000, 10,000 and as high as 25,000, but these estimates may reflect wishful thinking). The gathering in Amman, organized by the "Higher Coordination for Opposition Parties", traversed the well-worn march route from the Professional Association Headquarters to the United Nations offices in the Shmeisani district. There was a heavy security presence. Demonstrators chanted standard anti-USG rhetoric, rallied "against the war" and proclaimed their support for Palestinians and Iraqis. According to media reports and embassy contacts, there were some vocal calls against American troops on Jordanian soil and against the possibility that America might use Jordan as a "launch-pad" into Iraq. One media report indicated that a few slogans directly criticized PM Abul Ragheb (who in recent days has publicly dismissed rumors of USG troops in Jordan). The peaceful demonstration lasted approximately one and a half hours and dispersed without incident. One American journalist, who has been in Jordan several months and witnessed other demonstrations, described this one as "most unspectacular!"

[1](#)3. (SBU) In Irbid, approximately 2,000 marched to a similar beat. The demonstration, organized by the leftist "Jordanian People's Party", proceeded peacefully amidst a strong security presence. Standard pro-Palestinian, anti-war rhetoric was salted with slogans decrying the "double standard" of USG policy and admonishments against allowing US troops on Jordanian soil.

[1](#)4. (C) Smaller gatherings occurred over the weekend without incident. Embassy contacts report small, vocal gatherings of young adults (i.e. 30-50) in refugee camps. (Note: the overall mood in the camps, despite lack of visible protests, is tense.) On March 10, GOJ Department of Palestinian Affairs Director General Abdulkarim Abulhaija told RefCoord that he and the security services "are working day and night" to convince the refugee camps' political leaders -- both camp committees and leaders of various Palestinian factions -- that they should not take to the streets in the event of hostilities in Iraq. According to Abulhaija, Palestinian refugees in Jordan view Saddam Hussein as a champion of the Palestinian cause and will view a US-led attack on Iraq as furtherance of a "Zionist agenda." Abulhaija assured RefCoord that he and the security services are prepared to do everything in their power to maintain order in Jordan's refugee camps, but believes that it could be difficult.

[1](#)5. (C) In Jerash, the "political party organization committee" sponsored a "speech rally" on March 15 where IAF member Ali Leytoom reportedly delivered a polemic on the "conspiracy of the Zionist international movement" to a small audience (reportedly about a hundred people).

COMMENT

[1](#)6. (C) These demonstrations were similar in size, message and behavior to previous anti-war demonstrations (reftels). The GOJ appears to be handling the gatherings well, allowing Jordanian anti-war organizers to coordinate their events with anti-war movements worldwide. In general, our contacts hold the view that demonstrations here will likely remain tightly controlled and non-violent (despite the tension in the camps)

unless the hot button issue of the Israel/Palestinian conflict flares up significantly.

17. (C) Despite the lackluster rallies, the general public mood is hostile to the U.S., and especially so toward an attack on Iraq. There is a core of organizers who hold even more deep-seated anti-U.S. views, and we are seeing more written tracts calling the U.S. the "number one enemy" of Arabs and Muslims. This more radical minority will continue to express their anti-U.S. views, and could be tempted to take even more activist steps in the future.
GNEHM